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Israeli spy reports probed in 1950s

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The US government investigated reports that Israeli diplomats tried to recruit Arab and other informants in the United States more than 30 years ago, according to government documents and former US and Israeli officials with knowledge of the case.

Documents from US Army Intelligence and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, obtained under the Privacy and Freedom of Information acts, also refer to alleged Israeli espionage activities in the mid-1950s that occurred outside the normal channels of cooperation between the two countries.

Among alleged improprieties cited are reported Israeli efforts to obtain information from a State Department source outside those channels. Also cited are Israeli foreign service efforts to recruit US Embassy employees stationed in Israel.

The FBI investigated one report that former Israeli President Chaim Herzog sought to "obtain information" from an Arab Legion soldier when Herzog was Israel's defense attache in Washington.

In Jerusalem, a spokesman for Herzog, who was Israel's first chief of military intelligence, said he was "never involved in recruiting agents." Sources close to Herzog said he acknowledges meeting with a Jordanian soldier who "offered information about his country," but that he replied that he didn't recruit agents.

In a classified statement to the State Department in 1954, an Army Intelligence major reported that Herzog told a political officer in the State Department that he "turned the matter over" to an Israeli "security officer." Sources in Israel who did not wish to be identified recently said they believed the Arab Legion soldier was later recruited by the security officer.

The disclosure of the FBI investigations comes as US officials were in Israel questioning diplomatic and intelligence officials about Jonathan Jay Pollard, the 31-year-old naval intelligence officer charged with passing classified data to Israel.

The years 1953 to 1955 were a time of increased FBI concern over the threat of possible infiltration by "friendly" intelligence services, according to a previously undisclosed 1978 report of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

In 1954, according to a CIA study of Israeli intelligence found by the Iranians who seized the American Embassy in 1979 and later disclosed by the Globe, "a hidden microphone planted by the Israelis was discovered in the office of the US Ambassador in Tel Aviv." In 1956, the report adds, "two phone taps were found in the residence of the US military attache."

In a new book on the activities of Israel's supporters in the United States, Paul Findley, a former Illinois congressman and historian of intelligence matters, reports that the United States and Israel reached an informal agreement in 1956 to share classified information "and to restrict sharply clandestine operations each conducted in the other's territory."

Such espionage activities were not a one-way street, however.

A 1954 FBI memo reports that a former American consul in Haifa "jokingly" remarked to an Israeli diplomat that "several" Israelis had been in his employ.

Wolf Blitzler, chief US correspondent for The Jerusalem Post, charges in a new book, "Between Washington and Jerusalem," that the Americans engaged in espionage against Israel in the 1950s. Citing US and Israeli sources, he says such efforts included wiretapping in Israel and against Israeli facilities abroad, as well as unsuccessful efforts to recruit Israeli army officers sent to America for military training.

The details of Herzog's alleged meeting with an Arab Legion soldier, and other episodes, are contained in a March 20, 1954, statement by Wilbur Crane Eveland, a former US Army intelligence officer. A copy of the sworn statement, which was used against a State Department official later disciplined in connection with the case, was obtained by the Globe.

In it, Eveland, who was then a major in the Near East section of Army intelligence, said that Herzog had told the Israel-Jordan political officer of the State Department that Herzog had met with a soldier who "offered to give Herzog any information he might require on the Arab Legion."

Another report investigated by the FBI concerned an alleged Israeli success in recruiting as a paid informant the first secretary of the Jordanian embassy in Washington.

A Jan. 13, 1954, FBI memo notes Eveland's account of a discussion between the State Department official who was later disciplined, Fred Waller, and the first secretary of the Israeli embassy, Esther Herlitz, about Israel's al-

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leged activation of the Jordanian.

"Of important interest ... to the Bureau was a conversation ... in which, according to Eveland, Waller mentioned that during his tour as American Consul in Haifa ... at least two of his employees were on the Israeli payroll," the memo said. It went on to note that Waller then said that several Israelis had been in his employ.

"Waller ... then referred to [the Jordanian diplomat] and ... professed to know that he was in the pay of the Israeli Government. Miss Herlitz acknowledged that [the Jordanian] had been a paid agent of the Israeli Government."

The memo continues: "Waller then began to discuss the matter of Colonel Herzog's attempt to obtain information from an Arab Legion soldier stationed in Washington."

In Tel Aviv, Herlitz, who is a former member of the Knesset, confirmed in an interview that she knew Waller and that he had been disciplined for committing "an indiscretion." She said the Israeli embassy refused to cooperate with the FBI probe at the time, and that she would not now disclose the nature of her contacts with Waller.

Although Waller was initially marked for dismissal, he successfully appealed the charges against him and resigned, two of his superiors said in interviews.

Correspondent Yuval Elitzur contributed to this report.